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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Revision of the Terms of Reference of the Working Party

Revised Terms of Reference

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

The following document is submitted to the Working Party for review and discussion. It includes a first draft of the proposed revised Terms of Reference for the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) prepared by the open working group (Germany, Poland, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States and the secretariat) established at the 2017 session of the Working Party. Some more suggestions on how the Terms of Reference could be revised are made in the text under "comments by the Working Group". This document proposes that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) be reflected in the work of WP.7 without the amendments incurring financial implications.

The Working Party adopted its current Terms of Reference (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2007/12) at its November 2007 session. They were then approved by the UNECE Committee on Trade in October 2008 and by the Executive Committee on 20 March 2008 (document ECE/EX/2008/L.8, http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/aboutus.html)

This document is prepared according to ECE/CTCS/2017/10 section II c and ECE/CTCS/2018/2 section VII a.

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Terms of Reference

Mission Statement

The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards develops, interprets and promotes the practical application of internationally agreed commercial quality standards and guidance material for agricultural produce. Given the international impact of its work, The Working Party takes into account the needs of Governments as well as the private sector (producers, traders and consumers) from all countries where the standards are, or might be, implemented.

Comment by working group: *The term "promote" (first line) could be replaced by "fosters or encourages"*

Terms of Reference

1. The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (hereinafter referred to as WP.7), acting within the framework of the mandates and policies of the United Nations and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and subject to the general supervision of the UNECE Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, is entrusted with the implementation of the work under the UNECE Trade Subprogramme covering agricultural quality standards, related guidance material, training and sustainable production and consumption patterns for an inclusive economic growth. The activities of WP.7 and its Specialized Sections contribute directly to the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The work being primarily of a technical nature complements and is carried out in partnership with policy-related work undertaken by other international bodies.

2. The overall aim of its work is to:

- Facilitate fair and sustainable trade, prevent technical barriers to trade and provide a common trading language
- Promote the sustainable production and consumption of quality agricultural produce
- Define minimum quality requirements for agricultural produce in order to protect customers from unsatisfactory produce entering the market and to provide additional support to the market in defining levels of quality for agricultural products in commerce.
- Create market transparency for producers, traders and consumers and ensure that quality impairing the edibility of the produce is excluded from the market

Comments by the working group: *Indent 2 and 3 in paragraph 2: the term "produce" covers the areas of all Specialized Sections (since seed potatoes are not food and "produce" would be a good compromise.*

Consider including a reference to the SDGs in the "aim of its work" section.

3. In view of the international character of the trade in agricultural produce and the need for harmonized commercial agricultural quality standards, any Member of the United Nations or of one of its specialized agencies can participate, on an equal footing, in the activities of WP.7 and its Specialized Sections. Any country desiring to participate in the work of WP.7 shall contact the UNECE secretariat *and/or shall notify the Executive Secretary of the UNECE*, indicating the national focal point for this work and the institution responsible for quality control.

Comments by the working group: *Requirement to notify the Executive Secretary (see second sentence) to be verified and discussed.*

4. The Working Party may invite representatives of non-governmental organizations, civil society and of the private sector to participate, in a consultative capacity and in compliance with the respective United Nations rules and practices, in its consideration of any matter of particular concern to them.

Comments by the working group: *To be verified and discussed: who can invite the groups mentioned (Working Party, secretariat, and/or Specialized Sections)*

5. The Working Party defines its working procedures and those of its Specialized Sections.

6. These Terms of Reference can be amended by the Working Party as necessary, subject to approval by the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and the Executive Committee of the UNECE.

7. The Working Party shall:

- Draw up internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce based on existing national standards and industry and trade practices for: fresh fruit and vegetables (including early and ware potatoes); dry and dried produce; seed potatoes; meat; eggs; and cut flowers. The Working Party may develop standards for other agricultural products, as it considers necessary, subject to the availability of resources.
- Revise and amend existing standards to adapt them to changing production, trading and marketing conditions.
- Harmonize the application of its standards internationally by developing and disseminating interpretative and explanatory material.
- Undertake research activities relevant to the development, implementation and promotion of its standards.
- Monitor the application of the standards through reports from public administrations and the private sector.
- Promote the use of standards and assist Governments with their practical application by organizing training seminars, workshops and training courses.
- Promote uniform quality-control procedures and the use of the model quality conformity certificate. Work through its Specialized Sections and in cooperation with governmental, inter-governmental and other organizations implementing standards to achieve uniformity of inspection methods and comparability of results.
- Cooperate with other international organizations and standard-setting bodies, particularly with the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables, to avoid duplication of work and divergence in standards and interpretation. Ensure that that the standard-setting process is consistent with relevant international rules such as from the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- Promote communication between governmental, inter-governmental and other organizations implementing the standards and carrying out controls to provide a basis for transparent, fair and sustainable trade.

Comments by the working group: *Consider including references to the SDGs in this Section. Consider replacing "research activities" with a different term.*

The term "promote" (indents 6 and 7) could be replaced by "foster or encourage"

8. The Working Party is a standing body whose mandate and extension shall be reviewed every five years by the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and the Executive Committee of the UNECE.